Reflections
01/08/12

“Watcha doing, Grandaddy?” eleven year old Eleanor asked one morning last week. I’m not sure why, but Eleanor seems genuinely interested in what I’m doing.

“I’m working on next Sunday’s sermon,” I answered.

“How many more do you have to do?” she asked.

“Just four more,” I responded.

“Well, I guess you better make them good,” she declared, and then left me to ponder that.

Four more Sundays, and this morning I’m thinking about Baptism. One of the pastoral duties of a Presbyterian minister is the proper celebration of the Sacraments, The Lord’s Supper and Baptism. It is also one of the greatest privileges.

Every time we celebrate baptism, I think about the honor and privilege of it: in adult baptism, to be part of a very important public declaration of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. I think about them: the Muslim, who wanted to be a Christian and couldn’t find a church that would baptize him until he found this one. The young woman, urban professional, sophisticated, kneeling with tears running down her cheeks: the successful businessman, newly remarried, determined to build a new life and legacy here, on his knees, in front of the Baptismal Font.

And I think always, more and more recently, about a wonderful character in the Bible, Simeon. Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem for the rite of purification and dedication. They were met there by an elderly man, Simeon, who took the infant in his arms and said:

> “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant
> depart in peace,
> For my eyes have seen your salvation
> which you have prepared for all people.”

There is a sense in which the minister, in baptism, gets to hold the future in his or her arms, as old Simeon did, and to say the words – "You are a child of God, and you belong to Jesus Christ forever." And then to walk the child into the midst of the congregation and we all hold him or her for a moment or two.

It is such a wonderfully human moment. Parents are nervous, hoping their baby won't don't do something embarrassing. And with consistency the babies do just that: cry, scream, reach for parents who are abandoning them to this strange man dressed in black, some burp, throw up, load their diapers loudly at an inappropriate moment, some settle in and look at the minister beatifically and smile, others grab noses, glasses, Geneva tabs and, of course, the microphone. Others are mesmerized by the bright chancel lights, the colorful banners. Some look out at the church like royalty greeting subjects from the balcony of the palace. I have baptized 2,100 infants over the past 48 years.

My favorites have screamed, "No, no!" wriggling desperately in my arms – and one, after I said, "You belong to Jesus Christ forever" announced into the microphone "Uh, oh!" – appropriately, I thought.

And every time – I am deeply moved to be like Simeon, holding in my arms hope and the future of the church and world and affirming the good news of the Gospel that God loves each of us quite apart from anything we have done or failed to do – and that, in spite of whatever happens to us, we belong to Jesus Christ forever. And every time we pray to be reminded of our own baptism I remember that my parents brought me one time, 73 years ago, for my baptism.

I am reminded of the ongoing rhythm of the church that is bigger than any one of us. And my hope is that you, who have been so faithful, will continue to give the life and mission and witness of this church your very best in the important days ahead.

Be present when the community gathers to worship.
Be generous with your financial support.
Pray for the staff and officers and the Pastor Nominating Committee.
And be here when the babies are baptized – and you hold in your arms the future.